



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of July 4, 2024

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** June 21, 2024
From: Derrick Newman, Acting Director, Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Subject: Centennial Square Revitalization Concept Design Update

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve the updated concept design for Centennial Square and direct staff to proceed with implementation as outlined in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes key outputs of the Centennial Square Revitalization Concept Design Report and the project implementation process.

The concept design report outlines an updated vision for Centennial Square. Shaped by input in recent years, including community consultation, technical analysis and Council feedback, the design offers a blueprint for investments in this public amenity.

The key objectives of the project include:

- Enhancing the daily experience for visitors by creating a more welcoming, accessible and vibrant environment.
- Expanding the capacity to host a diverse range of events and programs well into the future.
- Renewing or replacing aging infrastructure to address operational issues.

Funding for this project has been approved in the 2024-2028 Financial Plan, which includes an allocation of \$4.5 million from the *Growing Communities* grant. Should Council support the recommendations in this report, staff will proceed with detailed design work immediately. Construction is anticipated to start in 2025 with completion expected in late 2026.

PURPOSE

This report describes the updated conceptual design and implementation process for the Centennial Square Revitalization Project, for Council consideration.

BACKGROUND

Centennial Square, the city's main civic plaza, was constructed in 1964 to commemorate Victoria's 100th year. For many decades this urban park has served the community as a venue for events and gatherings, including ceremonies, demonstrations, performances, cultural festivals, and markets.

The City has renovated portions of Centennial Square over the years in response to the community's evolving needs and to address emerging infrastructure issues. In 2019, following Council direction to create a more versatile and welcoming public space capable of accommodating a diverse range of special events and programming, the City developed the Centennial Square Action Plan. The plan incorporated extensive community input received through stakeholder workshops and meetings that explored possible design solutions for Centennial Square.

In June 2023, staff provided an update to Council on the project plan and recent insights on the Action Plan following the pandemic period. Staff advised that further analysis was required on the public art and central fountain, as well as potential commercial opportunities, and options for mitigating the effects of extreme heat. Funding to implement the design and construction work for this project was approved in the 2024-2028 Financial Plan.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The Centennial Square Revitalization Concept Design Report, included as Appendix A, builds upon previous work and provides additional site analysis informed by technical investigations. It contains detailed information on the updated concept design and implementation approach. The design was refined through a value engineering process guided by a team of professionals.

Design Overview

The updated concept design introduces new features to the heart of the Square to enhance the daily experience for residents and visitors. The large central plaza, with its interactive water feature, offers opportunities for both gathering and play. When activated, jets of water with integrated lighting and sound will create a lively atmosphere. When the water is deactivated, the plaza offers an unobstructed area for markets, performances, festivals and other cultural events.

The eastern edge of the central plaza introduces elements of play, with climbable cut stone blocks, plantings and water features. This area includes an elevated platform serving as a new performance stage.

Improved amenities and opportunities for expanded programming, combined with enhanced circulation and sightlines increase connectivity and functionality, which will help to activate the Square and make it more welcoming. The new design also addresses barriers to accessibility through thoughtful space arrangements, lighting, and surface grading.

A new sloping grass area on the west edge will offer a place to relax next to the McPherson Theatre. This expanded greenspace connects with Spirit Square, supports stormwater management, and helps to mitigate the impacts of extreme heat during the summer. New trees are proposed to be planted along the north edge where tree canopy can expand without obstructing views into the plaza.

The proposed approach includes a year-round commercial kiosk in the heart of the Square and support infrastructure for mobile vendors. The undercroft is proposed to continue housing the City's

bike valet service with minor improvements.

The future Douglas Street Rapid Transit Improvement project is expected to result in an improved transit stop at the entrance to the Square and will serve as a destination for RapidBus services. In addition, the pedestrian improvements associated with the City's Government Street Refresh project will further strengthen connections to the Chinatown area.

The updated concept design also targets improvements to accommodate large-scale events within the central plaza and a new performance zone adjacent to the McPherson Theatre. The Square will be equipped with power and water connections, facilitating easy access for event operations. The existing stage attached to the McPherson Theatre is proposed to be repurposed for much-needed storage of event staging and equipment to support events and programs.

To achieve the updated vision, the concept design incorporates changes to the public art and fountain as well as replacement of existing trees north of City Hall.

Relocating the Monoliths and Fountain

The monoliths and surrounding fountain were a central focal point of the original park design. Unfortunately, over time these features presented challenges relating to both asset maintenance and use of the Square for events. Based on recent investigations, staff have confirmed the scale of restoration work required for the three vertical art pieces and noted that the fountain spray appears to have contributed to the damage. Moreover, many of the fountain components are proving difficult to service due to the age and design of the mechanical system.

In the proposed design the monoliths are relocated and combined with a new pond at the east end of the Square. This change will result in improved functionality of the central plaza, and an ability to refurbish the art pieces prior to reinstalling them in a new high-profile site adjacent to Douglas Street.

Another change involves removal and replacement of trees in the green space north of City Hall to create a new plaza next to Douglas Street. The trees proposed for removal include a large sequoia, a sweetgum and a cherry tree. The design includes 17 new trees, appropriate for the urban location.

The proposed removal of the existing trees is based on a detailed technical assessment of each. This area of the Square was constructed on top of asphalt paving from the section of Cormorant Street that once passed through the site. City records indicate that the sequoia tree was planted years after the original development. The soil under the sequoia and sweetgum trees is shallow and sandy. The shallow rooting of the trees has led to damage of adjacent infrastructure, including heaving and cracked pavement, which has caused safety issues. The sequoia and sweetgum's root systems are also in very close proximity to an underground BC Hydro duct as well as other underground utilities, including a water main, stormwater infrastructure and telecom lines. The situation also poses a risk to the long-term stability of the trees due to their inability to anchor in deeper soils.

The new trees will be strategically planted using soil cells and root barrier systems, enabling the renewal and protection of adjacent underground utility services. This enhanced planting methodology captures stormwater to irrigate the trees and other natural assets and support the trees' health.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

OPTION 1 - (Recommended) That Council approve the Centennial Square Revitalization Plan and direct staff to proceed with implementation.

This option would direct staff to implement the Centennial Square Revitalization plan as outlined in the attached concept design report and proceed to the detailed design and construction phases using previously approved funding. Detailed design work will commence immediately and be completed by early 2025 with construction being completed in two phases:

- Phase 1 encompasses the area between Douglas Street and the central plaza. Construction is anticipated to begin in mid 2025 and be completed by late 2026.
- Phase 2 includes the expanded green and the commercial kiosk. Construction is expected to begin in mid 2027 and be completed by early 2028.

OPTION 2 - That Council provide alternative direction to staff on desired outcomes or potential improvements for Centennial Square.

Council may provide alternative direction to staff to modify the existing proposal or develop a revised version. In this instance, staff may need to report back to Council with additional information.

Impacts to Financial Plan

The design and engineering budget of \$750,000 was included in the 2023 Financial Plan. Additionally, Council approved an \$11.2 million budget to implement the plan as part of the 2024-2028 Financial Plan. To reduce property tax impacts, Council allocated \$4.5 million from the *Growing Communities* grant toward the revitalization plan. An additional \$150,000 from the Art in Public Places Reserve is proposed to cover the costs of restoring the three ceramic fin monoliths. Program and maintenance budgets will be included in future financial plans.

Table 1: Total Project Budget Summary

Project Component	Budget
Design	\$750,000
Phase 1 Construction	\$9,150,000
Phase 2 Construction	\$2,200,000
Growing Community Grant Funding	-\$4,500,000
Art in Public Places Reserve	-\$150,000
Total Funded Through Debt	\$7,450,000
<i>Note: The budget includes a 30% contingency of approximately \$2.5 million and an allowance of \$500,000 for cost escalation</i>	

Accessibility Impact Statement

The new vision for Centennial Square is premised on advancing key goals from the City’s Accessibility Framework. The revitalization work will align with the City’s commitment to removing barriers and promoting equitable access for individuals of all ages and abilities.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The revitalization of Centennial Square is an identified priority in the Strategic Plan.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The Centennial Square Improvements Project and Updated Concept aligns closely with the goals of the Official Community Plan by contributing to downtown vibrancy, walkability, arts and culture, inclusivity, community health and well-being, environmental sustainability, and resiliency.

Climate Leadership Plan

The updated concept responds to goals set out in the City's *Climate Leadership Plan*, with design solutions that promote sustainability and climate adaptation. These include sustainable stormwater management, new resilient trees in healthy growing conditions, new water features which will reduce and recycle water onsite, and high-quality public realm materials that can be reused or recycled.

CONCLUSIONS

The updated Centennial Square concept design has been informed by public input and builds on previous plans and technical studies. The design honours the Square's historic significance while upgrading and replacing infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of the community. This blueprint will guide the revitalization efforts to establish Centennial Square as a vibrant, welcoming and inclusive space, realizing its full potential as Victoria's primary civic plaza.

Respectfully submitted,

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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

List of Appendices:

Appendix A – Centennial Square Revitalization Project Concept Design Report